

# The One Way Out

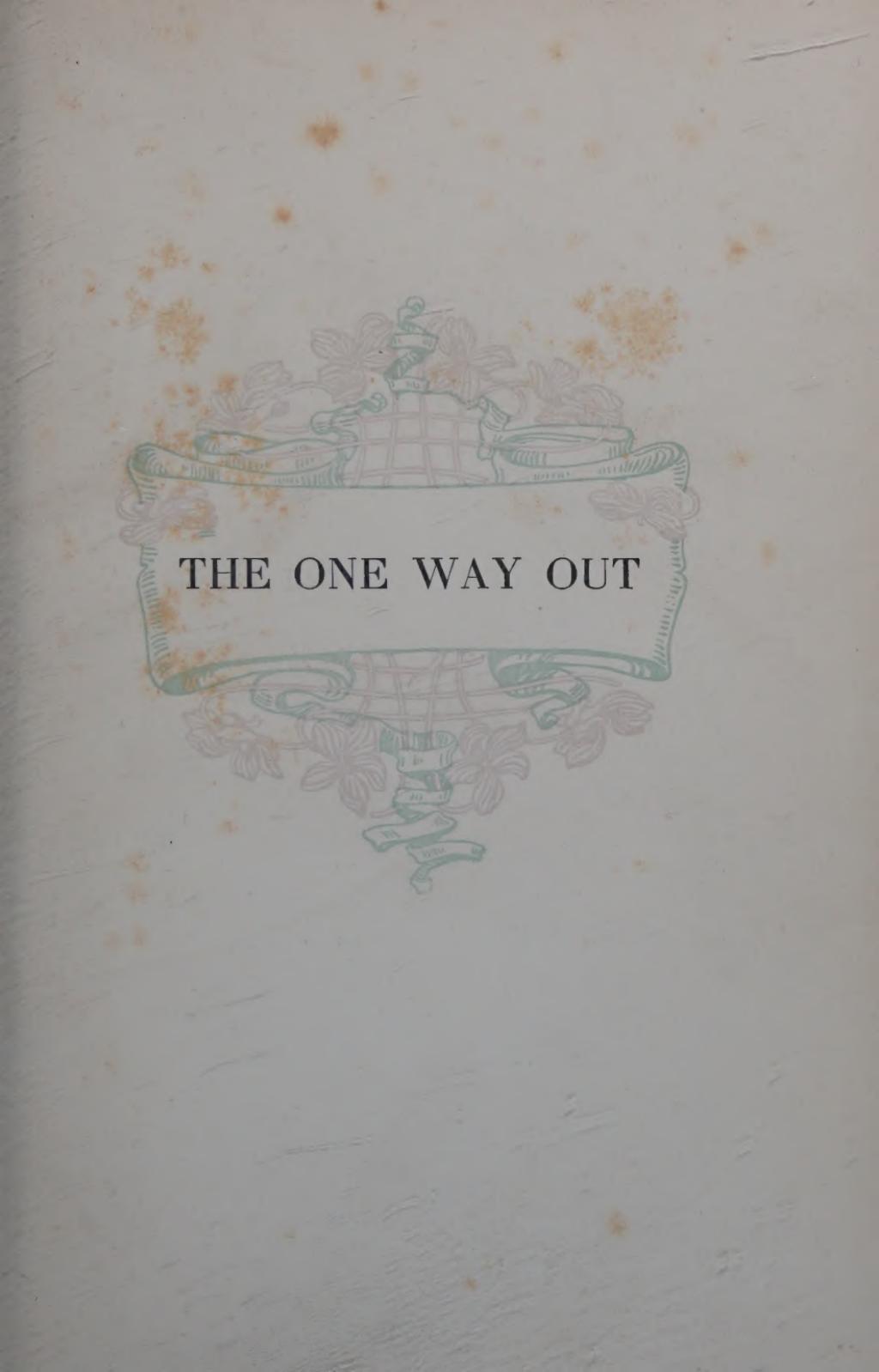


Bettina Von Hütten







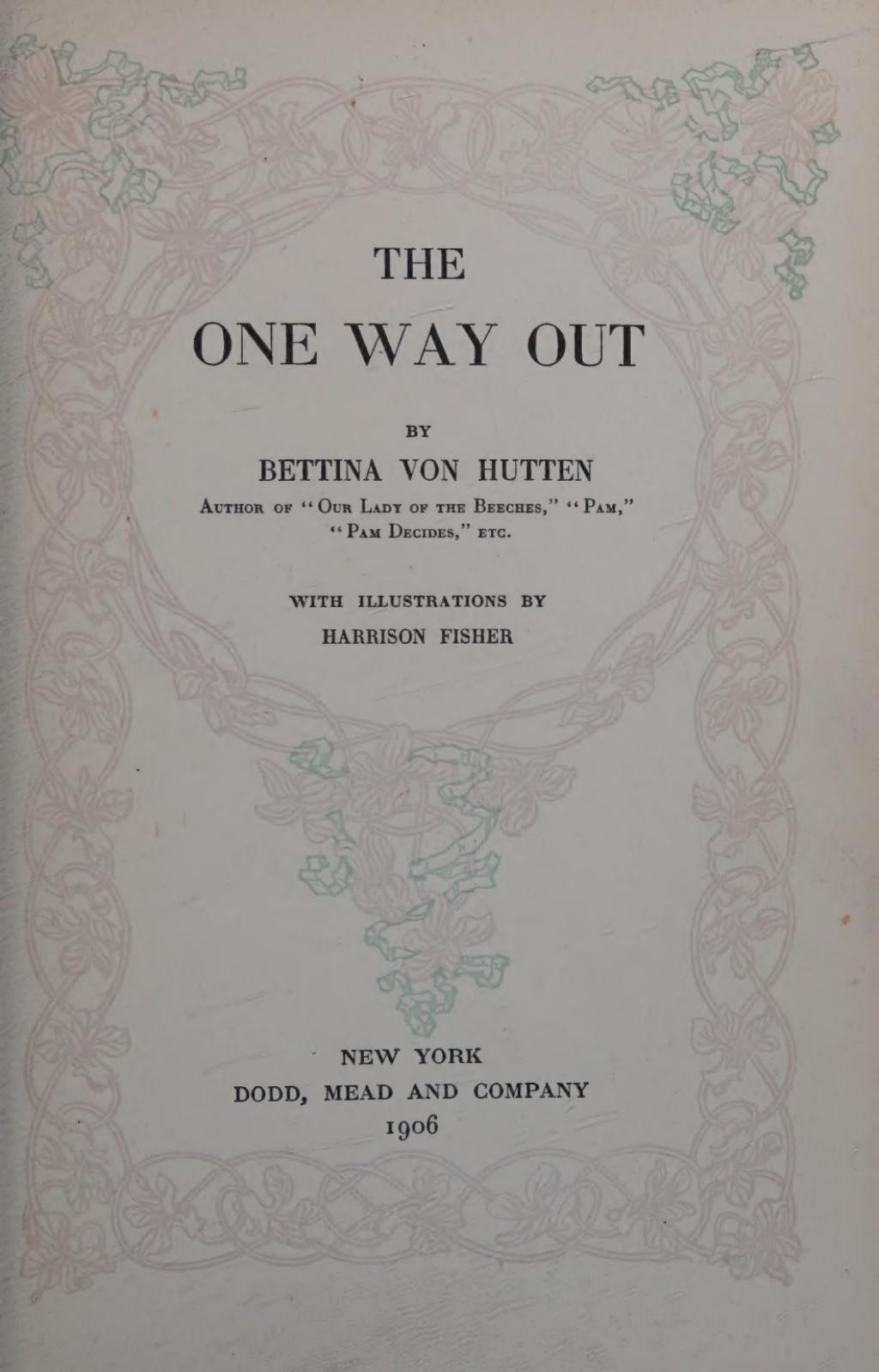


THE ONE WAY OUT









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BY

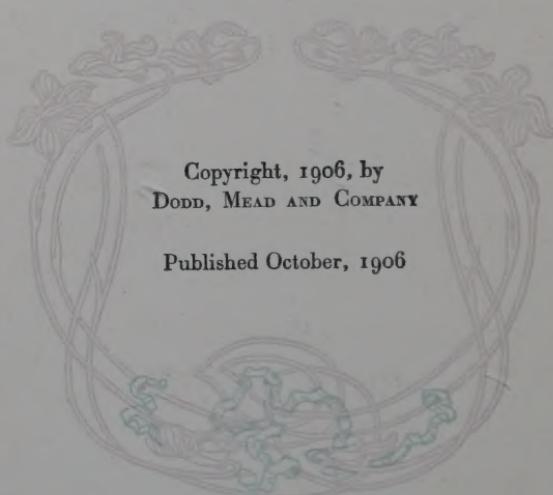
BETTINA VON HUTTEN

AUTHOR OF "OUR LADY OF THE BEECHES," "PAM,"  
"PAM DECIDES," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HARRISON FISHER

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PART  
I



# THE ONE WAY OUT

## I

WHEN the door had closed behind him Adrian Bellew stood for a moment looking into the rain-blown darkness. Across the street an electric light served to show up all the horrors of the tempestuous night; its thick, glutinous mud; the pouring rain, its malevolent rebound toward chilled ankles; the wind's strength against all things, animate and inanimate.

Bellew shuddered. He was a fastidious man and hated wet as a cat hates it.

And he was in evening dress and had not even an umbrella.

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Everything, he thought, was bad enough, but this minor evil of having to walk—whereon he decided to go—seemed to him the worst of all.

The rain, beaten by a sudden gust of wind, blew against his face as he cowered against the inhospitable door, and with a rueful laugh he plunged down into the thick of it.

Turning instinctively toward home he crossed the street and went rapidly along Mount street to Berkeley square, meaning to cross Piccadilly at St. James street.

It was mid-November and, in spite of the wind, scraps and shreds of a “London particular”

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still clung to the corners and veiled the lighted vistas at the turnings. Bellew had turned up the collar of his light coat, but the water trickled into his neck, while his evening shoes were already soaked.

“ Damnation ! ” he exclaimed aloud once as he walked along the near side of Berkeley square; “ I might as well blow my head off at once ! ”

The details of the late interview returned again and again to his mind. Courtland was not so bad, for a second cousin; he had twice paid all Bellew’s debts, would very probably have stumped up again but for this ridiculous, maddening fact of his own comparative ruin.

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West Courtland was for sale, the jewels had gone, young Val would have to sell out, and even the little house in Mount street would have to go.

Poor old Courtland had almost wept in telling all these sad things. Bellew's boundless surprise had at first kept him silent, and afterward his pity for the broken man before him had obliterated all memory of his own desperate state from his mind.

His adopting the role of consoler was deliciously absurd, he now realized. If Courtland considered himself ruined, he at least had the little place in Ireland to retire to and enough to buy bread and clothes for his family.

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Whereas he, Bellew, had exactly fifteen pounds six and ten-pence in the world.

It had its amusing side.

Bellew's mother had been Irish, and, wet and miserable though he was, her son laughed aloud as he realized how infinitely he preferred his own condition, free, to that of his cousin, hampered with an estimable wife and faultless if slightly uninteresting children.

“If only I wasn't such a damned lazy brute,” he mused, “the fifteen, six and ten-pence would get me to America and I could—work. H'm—work!”

He loathed work of any kind; he was a gambler; more or less

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of a drinker; a fatalist; a late riser; a born and charming idler; a mild lover of pretty women; a passionate lover of this old, smoky, irresistible, wonderful London.

And he had for years drifted along, amusing and boring himself, trusting for his living to the diminutive fortune, every penny of which he had just lost in a mad fit of the speculative frenzy, to occasional gifts from Lord Courtland and to his luck at cards.

Now he had come, as he put it, to the end of his rope. He was utterly ruined, though no one knew it, and some kind of a decision had to be made.

“I’ll toss up for it,” he decided lazily—“heads, a bullet;

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tails, leave London. And I wonder which would be worse?"

As he reached this point he came to a striped awning stretching to the street from the door to his right, and while he stood still, glad of the frail shelter, a carriage clattered up behind him and stopped at the awning.

Bellew drew back into the wet darkness and watched the footman open the door of the carriage.

"Three o'clock, James."

"Very good, my lady."

A floating vision of velvet and fur and yellow hair, a blaze of light as the house door opened to admit the belated guest, a bang of the carriage door, a remark of the footman to his colleague

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on the box, and Bellew was again alone.

“Betty Pole, by Jove!” he said aloud, wrinkling his nose to sniff the scent still hanging in the damp air. “Ideal and *Orchidée*—delicious!”

He loved scent, this modern Briton, and the swishing of the pretty woman’s silken skirts sounded entrancingly on his ears. Leave London? Not he.

He was not good for much, but he fitted London; he belonged there and nowhere else.

“Betty Pole would marry me if I asked her,” he thought, taking off his hat and smoothing his satiny, dark hair. “She’s got nearly as many debts as I have,



A floating vision of velvet and fur and yellow hair.



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but she can't touch her principal.  
Good Lord, I *couldn't* work."

The house before which he stood was Sir John Seton's, and Lady Seton was giving a ball. Good! There goes the music.

Bellew laughed aloud and stamped on the carpet to shake some of the water from his shoes.

"I think I'll change my mind and go to this ball," he said aloud.

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### II

“HELLO, Adrian; I haven’t seen you for an age!”

Lady Betty Pole smiled up at the newcomer and made room for him beside her. “Where have you been?”

Bellew looked at her gravely. “I have been in hell.”

“In—good gracious! You do say the most awful things!”

“You asked me,” he returned.

“Well, doesn’t one often ask questions without wanting the real answer?”

She was very pretty in the becoming light of modern houses. He knew that she was painted

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and powdered, dyed and padded and laced. He also knew that she was a flirt without a heart, a ravenous gobbler of gifts of all kinds; that she had had loves without ever loving. He knew her to be a liar. But—she meant London to him.

“If I told you what I meant,” he resumed, after looking steadily into her eyes for a moment, “you would laugh at me, and with reason.”

“Laugh at you? Ah, no, Adrian.”

His dark, worn, rather weak face was of the beauty that attracts superficial women, and some better ones. He saw admiration in her blue eyes.

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“But I say, with reason, I have been in hell for the past week because I am a fool.”

“Tell me.” She had no heart, but she was emotional and loved a tête-à-tête scene with an attractive man, and Adrian Bellew’s rather evil reputation had a potent charm for her.

“Well, I am forty-one, and—I have fallen in love.”

She laughed, drawing up her lip in a little sneer.

“For the first time?”

“No,” he said fiercely, leaning toward her. “For the last. And that is worse.”

Her eyes wavered; then she laughed again.

“Poor you! Who is the lady?”

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“You know.”

“I don’t.”

“Don’t lie, Betty. You do know.”

His eyes still held hers, but she held her fan to her too red lips.

“Of course, you mean me. Well, I am much flattered, but — I must beg to decline the honor.”

Bellew paled. Since he had entered the house he had so felt the absolute impossibility of his leaving the life beloved so well that Betty Pole had grown to look to him an almost angelic aid in his despair.

He drew a deep breath. She must accept him; and, suddenly

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seizing his dying courage, he said, “I have not asked you to marry me.”

“Oh! But then what? You did mean that! What else could you have meant?” she stammered in angry confusion.

“I mean that I love you, but that—my God, woman, I am not altogether insane to imagine that I could be happy with a wife like you!”

“How—how dare you——?”

“I dare anything. I know all about you; why pretend I don’t? Your character is no more real than your complexion. You are the worst liar in London—you. If I were able to marry I’d marry some young girl—yes, some good,

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innocent child whom you would call bread-and-butter——”

He broke off as she rose, trembling with anger, and rose, too.

“Now you know. Only——” and his voice fell to one of incredible softness——“I——love you.”

For a moment she paused, flushed and breathing hard. Would she or would she not fall into the trap? He thought she would, from the trembling of her mouth.

Then suddenly she laughed. “Very clever, Mr. Adrian Bellew, and if I were a few years younger I might have been fooled. Good-night and——good-bye. You will not speak to me again.”

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She walked slowly away, leaving him standing by the sofa.

She was cleverer than he had thought. She had seen through his trick. And—he must leave London. He was not a coward and would undoubtedly have risked his life for hers at that very moment, but as his hopes crumbled he silently consigned her to that place from which he had a few moments before announced his recent return.

III

WELL, that was over; but, having begun, why stop?

There was Alice Bradnor in a horrible, spangled frock. She had been out for six winters and was beginning to be bored. She had red elbows and scant hair, but she had plenty of money.

Bellew threaded the crowded space between Miss Bradnor and himself with a magnificent air that he felt was admired by his projected victim. She was romantic, he knew, and had expressed a wish to model his head. He was not a vain man, but he knew the value as a personal asset of his

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great stature and small, well-shaped, dark head.

The admiration the girl felt for him shone in her uninteresting eyes as he led her into the next room and settled her in the sheltered corner where he had been left by Lady Betty.

“How does the sculpture go?” he asked.

“Oh, fairly well. I have been too busy to get in much hard work, and only hard work counts.”

“Yes,” agreed the idler gravely, “only hard work. I missed you at the Whistler Exhibition on Thursday.”

“Oh, how nice of you! I was down in Yorkshire for my cousin Harry Carr’s coming of age.”

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“Some of the etchings were very fine,” went on Bellew, looking at her, “but I am such a groper in the realms of art; I need someone to lead me.”

At these words the girl’s face flushed violently and Bellew mentally grinned. She was very plain, but she was a thoroughly nice girl, and she meant London.

“I looked all over for you, and then I left.”

“I feel very much flattered,” Miss Bradnor returned, with a painful effort at lightness, “but I’m sure you might easily have found a much better guide than I. I don’t know much myself.”

For a moment there was silence, while Bellew’s eyes talked

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eloquently. They said, "I love you; it is the love of my life, and only a conviction of my own unworthiness prevents my telling you with words."

"You didn't go to Grays', either," he said at length.

"N-no," she stammered, confused between the two conversations he had addressed to her, "I—I had a cold."

"You had told me you were going."

"I know. And then I caught a horrid cold. I was awfully disappointed."

Her figure could be made good, he realized, by the proper kind of stays and frocks. And she might wear a transformation. She was

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better than that little brute of a Betty Pole, besides having ten times the money.

“Look here,” he said suddenly, leaning toward her. “I am going to America to-morrow, and there’s something I want to tell you. May I?”

“Oh!” she cried faintly. “America? Why are you going to America? I can’t imagine you away from London!”

“Neither can I,” returned Bellew, hiding a sudden grim smile by pulling his mustache, “but I shall probably sail to-morrow on the *Umbria*.”

The room being momentarily empty but for themselves, he laid his hand on hers as he finished

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speaking, and she looked at him with eyes that swam in tears.

“You like me a little, I know,” he went on, “and I want to know whether you ever could — like me more?”

But to his surprise she rose abruptly.

“Oh, I am so sorry, so very sorry, Mr. Bellew. Please let’s go back into the ballroom.”

“No. Not until you have answered my question.”

“Well—I—I am sorry, but I never can like you more. Oh!” —she added, with visible relief — “here comes my partner, Mr. Wilson.”

Bellew, when he was alone, after watching her departure on

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the arm of the insignificant youth with the large flower in his coat, turned and looked at himself in the glass over the sofa.

“I haven’t grown perceptibly old or ugly since that night at the Opera, and she seemed to find me fairly attractive then. What the devil is the matter with me? Well, whom shall I try next? I will not leave England, and other men marry for money, so why shouldn’t I? Ah, there’s that little Miss Fermoy; she might do.”

With an amused smile he went on into the ballroom, and, as he turned to creep along the wall, out of the reach of the dancers, he came face to face with a very

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young girl in a beautiful white frock.

“Oh, Cousin Adrian, *you here?*”

She held out her thin hand and then, as he took it, added, “I’m sure you have n’t been here long?”

“Came here half an hour ago. How are you, Bramley?”

The elderly gentleman on whose arm the young girl was leaning coughed. “I say, Adrian, you won’t mind taking Eve and finding a quiet corner for her to rest in? The doctors won’t let her dance much, so I’ve just snatched her away from her partners, and I’m so thirsty I simply must get something to drink.”

Back to the historic sofa Bellew led the girl, and with rather queer feelings watched her sit down in the corner lately occupied by Lady Betty and Alice Bradnor. Eve Bramley was a distant cousin of his, and only twenty. She was a slight, exquisitely fair young creature with brown eyes set in dark, shadowy lashes. Bellew drew a long breath as he sat down by her.

“Well, what have you been doing with yourself of late?” he asked.

“I? Oh, nothing, Cousin Adrian. I have not been very well. We are going to Cannes after Christmas.”

“To Cannes?”

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“Yes. And you can’t think how I loathe it—the hot sun, and the cold wind, and the dust, and the gay people. But Sir Evelyn says I must go. My lungs are all right, he says, but I am not strong.”

Bellew sat motionless. He had dreaded seeing her again after his last visit to Berkshire; he had meant never to do so, and yet here they were, alone, and sitting on that cursed sofa.

“Always rather liked Cannes, myself,” he observed carelessly, his eyes fixed on the door of the ballroom.

The girl did not answer, and there was a long silence. Bellew did not turn, but he saw her

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without looking at her. He knew that she, too, was thinking of that evening in August, on the terrace.

He was forty and she twenty, and she was an angel and he anything but an angel; he was a ruined gambler and she the only daughter of rich old Hugh Bramley. These were some of the reasons why he had left Ufton the day after that evening of which they were both thinking, but they seemed now strangely inadequate reasons. He turned suddenly, clearing his throat.

“I’m glad I met you here, Eve,” he said, “for I’m going to America to-morrow.”

“To America?”

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It was just what Alice Bradnor had said, and he moved uneasily.

“Yes. I was going to write to say good-bye. I am writing to everyone; loathe verbal adieux.”

The girl sat very quiet, her hand folded over her fan.

“Why are you going?” she said at length.

A wild impulse came to him. He would tell her the truth. “I’m about ruined,” he answered, “and there’s no good trying to live in a different way here.”

“Ruined?” Her voice frightened him.

“Well, in a way. I mean I’ve lost money and shall have only enough to live very quietly—

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though I can be quite comfortable," he added, with a quiet look at her white face. "I think I'll go out to California."

"Adrian, tell me the truth."

She never before called him Adrian without the prefatory "cousin," and he started.

"My dear child, I have told you the truth. I shall leave these gay scenes and begin life over as a—a horny-handed—"

"Oh, don't!" she cried sharply. "Don't treat me like that. Are you really too—too poor to go on living here in England?"

"I am, but I can be—"

"Wait, Adrian; you remember that night at Ufton? On the terrace?"

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He nodded. "Eve, don't you want to go back into the ball-room? It's cold here."

"No, no. Wait. Well, that night—do you remember what you said to me?"

Bellew drew a long breath. This, then, was to be the one way out of his difficulties? He had only to say the word and she would be his—she herself, and her money. He could stay in England; live on as he loved life; be a man.

"Eve!"

As he said the word it all hung in the balance; he did not know how he meant to continue. Then, all expectant, flushed and trembling, she looked up at him, and

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the scale went down. He could not do it, for the simple reason that he loved her.

He rose. "Let's go and—watch the dancing," he said hoarsely, "and I fear I'm engaged for the next dance."

She followed him in a smitten silence, and when he had handed her over to her father, he rushed off toward the door, with the intention of leaving. At the head of the stairs he trod on a long pink train, and turning to apologize, found himself speaking to Enid Fermoy. She was of common stock, and showed it, but her fortune was great, and her sisters had married well.

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“How d’ye do?” she said frigidly.

“My heart is broken for having torn your frills. Can you forgive me?”

“Yes. But I don’t think I can forgive you for never coming to see us. Have you been away?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

Her nose was broad and coarse-skinned, and her small, square figure could never be improved, but she had quantities of beautiful fair-colored, wavy hair, and good teeth.

“Let me take you down to supper, and I’ll tell you where I’ve been,” he said suddenly.

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With the air of conscious cruelty sometimes observed in charmless women rendered attractive by their money, she immediately dismissed her cavalier and took Bellew's arm. Hardly daring to allow himself to think of Eve Bramley, he talked rapidly until they were seated at a small table with food and wine before them. Then he looked at her, waiting for her to give him a cue.

"I'm glad to see you," she began, sipping champagne. "I want to ask your advice."

"I am much honored, Miss Fermoy."

The winter before she had rather persecuted him by her

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attentions, he remembered, but of late he had hardly seen her. He wondered, as he rubbed his wet and aching feet together under the table, what on earth she wanted his advice for.

She was less attractive than either Betty Pole or Miss Bradnor, but she was, he thought, truthful; she would not expect artistic sympathy as the latter would, and she would surely behave better than Betty.

“It’s about my marriage,” pursued Miss Fermoy.

“You—are you engaged?”

He paled as he spoke, and her sharp little eyes seeing it, she, of course, mistook the cause.



"I'm glad to see you," she began, sipping champagne. "I want to ask your advice."



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“Yes. Two men have proposed to me, and I can’t make up my mind.”

“And you want me to advise you?”

“Yes.”

“You must, in that case, tell me who they are.”

She took up her champagne glass. “Lord Carricknacross and the Marquis of Hengist-Horsham.” Her voice rang with triumph.

Bellew laughed. “A nice pair! Carricknacross is a drunkard, and Hengist-Horsham? Well, it would take too long to give you a list of his qualities.”

“You are very rude.”

“I know I am. I—can’t bear to think of your wasting yourself

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on such a man as either of them.  
So forgive my bad manners."

She nodded. "Yes, I forgive you. So you advise against either of them."

"I do."

"A girl in my position has a hard time," she went on, sighing. "I always fear — that they want my money."

"The two you named, no doubt, do. There are other men in the world, however."

"Yes. I sometimes wonder why I, who am not at all pretty — ?"

Bellew looked at her.

"No; I should certainly not call you pretty," he said slowly. "But I could tell you why."

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“Why?”

“Well—it’s charm.”

Poor, charmless child of medicated soap! Drinking it in, her eyes asked for more.

“Charm? In me?”

His bills, all many times renewed, were due to-morrow, and he had in the world just £15 6s. 10d. He lied with the skill born of dire and instant necessity.

“How can you ask me that? Haven’t you tortured me enough? You know perfectly well that——”

He was, she had always thought, the handsomest man in town, and he was hand in glove with many of the apparently great.

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He had long troubled her fancy,  
and now she felt her heart.

“I don’t know what you mean,”  
she murmured with an elephan-  
tine coyness that annoyed him  
terribly.

“I mean—you know that for  
me, you are—the only—(way  
out,” he added silently).

Enid Fermoy blushed. Then  
she paled.

“You mean ——”

“That I love you. Exactly.”

He had advanced with con-  
summate skill up to this point.  
Then, remembering the effect of  
his words on lovely Eve Bramley,  
he blundered, by going on, “I  
should not have told you, Miss  
Fermoy, but—I am going to

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America to-morrow, and—  
heaven knows if I can see you  
again."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—that I am a ruined  
man, and am leaving England  
forever to-morrow."

He watched her, waiting for  
her to speak.

"What do you mean by  
ruined?" she asked.

He told her in picturesque and  
pathetic words, his dark eyes  
fixed on hers.

Then she rose. "Well," she  
said, pulling on her gloves, "I'm  
glad you told me that. It was  
very gentlemanly of you, and I  
hope you'll get on well in  
America."

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He had forgotten the mercantile spirit that had been born in her.

“Then—you refuse me because I am poor?” he cried bitterly.

She shook her head. “No, I don’t refuse you, because you didn’t ask me. I’m sorry” (with a swift resumption of the coquettish manner) “to have hurt you, but—I can’t help it. Good-bye.”

Leaving him planted there she joined some people who were going out of the dining-room, and disappeared.

## IV

BELLEW did not go to bed that night. He sat by his fire until dawn, going over and over in his mind the events of the evening. Only of Eve he would let himself think.

"It is one of the few decent things I ever did," he told himself, "and there's no use regretting it."

It surprised him that he, who had always been considered an irresistible man, should have met with such treatment. And the next day—that day—he must make a bolt for it out of this dear little country. He must leave

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these pleasant rooms full of pretty things ; he must become now in practice what he had long been in fact—a poor man.

“Ah, my God !” he moaned once, “one of them might have taken me !”

Toward dawn he fell asleep in his chair and dreamed he was buying a six thousand pound Mercedes. When he awoke the coward in him winced.

“I can’t bear it, I can’t,” he said aloud, rising.

He would have made a good husband, far better than Betty Pole or that little soap girl deserved, his life would have been a beautiful —

“Letter, sir.”

His servant gave him the letter and left the room. It was the last time he would bring the letters, the last time of everything. Mechanically he tore open the top envelope.

DEAR ADRIAN: Come and see me this afternoon. I have not slept for thinking of you, and must see you. I never dreamt of caring for you, but for the horrible things you said —

Ten pages of it, signed, of course, "Betty."

Bellew laughed half hysterically. It was wonderful. And how awful she must look without any make-up! He wished it had been even the medicated soap girl.

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The next letter, which he opened while thinking of Betty, ran :

DEAR MR. BELLEW : I have been thinking all night about what you said. Girls in my position get used to thinking men want their money, and so at first I didn't like you being ruined. But if you will forgive me, I will marry you. I am sure you will not want to waste my money as Tippy wastes my sister Mona's. That would be wicked and break my heart.

Come and see me this morning, dear Adrian (I do so love your name, but you mustn't be jealous of it!).

ENID.

“Oh, my Lord!” Bellew burst into a loud laugh as he read. “Both of them! I wonder if this is from the sculptress?”

It was.

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DEAR ADRIAN (it began): The reason I said I could never like you more is that I love you with my whole heart already. I have loved you ever since that day at Henley. I *had* to say no, as I was engaged to Freddy Wilson, but I could n't stand it, and broke the engagement before leaving Lady Seton's. Oh, I am so happy, and you must n't think me forward in writing this way. Come and see me at eleven.

ALICE.

Bellew read the three letters again without moving. And then, with a strong shudder, looked up out of a near window.  
“Rather *death*,” he said.

Then sitting down at his writing-table, he put each letter into an envelope and addressed it to its sender.

“Johnson—a hansom, and enough clothes in the steamer

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trunk to last to New York. I shall not need you."

Half an hour latter Bellew came out of his bedroom with an overcoat on, his hat in his hand.

"You know why I'm off, Johnson," he said simply; "I'm sorry to lose you, but I've paid you, and you needn't know too much for a few days."

Johnson blew his nose. "You took the early boat for Dover, sir," he said; "that's all *I* know."

When the man had gone down to the hansom with the hand luggage, Bellew stood still for a moment, looking round him.

"I'm the damnedest idiot," he said aloud. "I wonder whether

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I'd have stayed if only one had changed her mind? Is it separately or collectively that they're so horrible to me? Or is it——?"

Going to the chimneypiece he took from it a small photograph of Eve Bramley, in a silver frame, and looking at it for a moment, put it into his pocket.

Then he went downstairs to the hansom.





PART  
II



I

THE public is incredulous and sarcastic when it reads of wonderful happenings in novels, but curiously simple-minded in accepting the half or wholly fabulous events chronicled in the press.

So remember, oh you who shake your heads over the event about to be recorded, that if you had read it in your morning paper on your way downtown in the elevated, it would never have occurred to you to doubt its plausibility. In a word, Adrian Bellew did what so many men did in the golden forties. He struck gold, though in a way

differing from that picturesque one we have all loved in Bret Harte.

He was sitting, that warm day, at his midday meal,—a horror of fried meat and soggy pies,—in the fly-filled dining-room of the Excelsior Hotel in Nugget City.

Bret Harte, only, could have described the room and the men who occupied it. I can but say that it was a scene of sordid discomfort such as Bellew would a year before have been unable to endure, but which he now surveyed, as he hungrily attacked the abominable food set before him, with a certain philosophical boredom. The man himself, in

his shabby clothes, his face lengthened by a thick beard, his nails broken and discoloured, was by far less distinguishable from his companions than he would have believed, and an outsider, coming in as the rapid meal went on, would, unless an unusually sharp observer, have been obliged to wait until Bellew spoke before recognizing him as the gentleman of the assembly.

During the year and a half that had passed since he landed in New York, Bellew had gone through various phases of hard luck. Not of a strong enough character to force fortune, too disheartened to take any interest in his different make-shifts, he

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had drifted about like a man in a bad dream, unable to help himself, caring less and less what became of him.

And after successively driving a public vehicle in Omaha, a brief novitiate as a bartender, six weeks in a hospital, the result of a dispute over a drink in the mixing of which he failed to satisfy an exigent customer, and other periods of wholly unsuccessful attempts to earn his living, he had taken to digging,—not for gold, but as a day-labourer,—and finding, after the pains in his untrained muscles had subsided, that the work suited him physically, was still doing it that day when he struck gold.

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He had just helped himself to a huge slice of pie when the pompadoured waitress, Miss Myrtle M'Griffin, came in with a packet of letters.

“Here’s one for you, George,” she observed with the metallic coquetry so popular with her public, “from your Honey-Bag, I bet! And here’s one from the old folks at home, Bill,” to a huge Mississippian with a turquoise ring on his little finger, “and—one for our own dear Tenderfoot!”

Everyone laughed, for Bellew having once explained to a circle of delighted listeners how great had been his disappointment on first arriving in the West at never once being addressed by the

## THE ONE WAY OUT

classic nickname, it had instantly been adopted by his fellow-labourers, and he answered to it with varying degrees of docility.

This time he merely grunted, and taking the letter, opened it carelessly. For a long minute the drowsy buzzing of the myriad flies was the only thing he heard, and then the sound of voices came back to him, and blindly fumbling for the eyeglass he had not worn for eighteen months, he rose and went out of the room and to the open house-door.

The horizon was bounded on all sides by baking red birch; a girl drove by in a buggy, her jaws working merrily over chewing-gum; in the distance

## THE ONE WAY OUT

some one whistled “Hiawatha”; a train lumbered slowly over the invisible line to the left. And the burning sun, it seemed, stood still in the heavens.

Suddenly the man who had struck gold gave a short laugh, and turning on his heel went back to the dining-room. “Twins?” suggested the man from Mississippi, jocularly, and Bellew, from whom none of the other’s well-meant witticisms had heretofore drawn the slightest tribute, smiled — the civil smile of one gentleman for another’s pleasantry. Miss Myrtle M’Griffin, whose habit was to devote her fingers to her coiffure more than is strictly desirable in a waitress, drew her pompadour

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to a height of half a foot and then patted it fondly into place before she dashed at the empty plates and retired with them. "A very nice young woman," observed Bellew with conviction as the door closed.

"You bet she is!" returned a freckled youth at the far end of the table; "but you better not let her hear you calling her a *woman*. She's a lady, Myrtle is."

"I want to be a loidy," sang Bellew, softly, and then when they all stared, he leaned forward, his hands held out persuasively, almost affectionately. "Gentlemen," he said in a strangely soft voice, "you must all drink with me!"

## THE ONE WAY OUT

His manner was so unlike the usual half-surly indifference to which he had accustomed them that even the offer of drinks did not break the spell, and to a man they still stared, until the reappearance of Miss M'Griffin caused a reaction and they all spoke at once, accepting his invitation with enthusiasm.

“Now,” said Bellew, rising and holding up his glass, “you must drink my health, for I have struck gold.”

“Gold!”

“Gold, by God? But *where—where?*”

“In—Africa,” answered Bellew, very gently. Then, still with the extraordinary sweetness

## THE ONE WAY OUT

in his voice and manner, as if he wished to apologize to them for his luck in the face of their unchanged fortunes, he told his story.

“Years ago—nine or ten—I was in Capetown. I met a chap there—a poor devil, out at elbows and discouraged—who told me he knew where gold was, but had n’t the money necessary to look for it. I—I was rich then, and—somehow the poor chap got on my nerves, and I was sorry for him, and—well, I lent him the money. He was a gentleman—”for a moment the narrator hesitated, remembering that he was in a land where all men are gentlemen, and then, his nervous hands deprecating

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reproach, hurried on, “—and he insisted on giving me a paper promising that I should have half of all that he found. I took the paper—to save his feelings. And now—it appears he found gold on the identical spot, but only a year ago, and—half of it is, according to law, but only because he was honourable and has told me of it,—mine.”

“Oh, gosh!” murmured Miss M’Griffin, loosening her pompadour over her ears with both hands, “half of a gold mine!”

“Extraordinarily decent of the fellow, wasn’t it?” pursued Bellew, setting down his glass. “I never should have heard of it in the world.”

## THE ONE WAY OUT

There was a short pause during which each man present asked himself whether his own honour could have gone to such lengths, and Bellew rose.

“I leave by the 1.45. Boys,” he pursued, employing for the first time the generic term used by his companions, “good-bye.”

But though they all shook his hand they accompanied him in a body to his room under the galvanized roof of the hotel, and then to the depot, as they called the station, where they gave him the noisiest and heartiest of farewells.

Bellew had not loved them. They had annoyed and bored him, and yet as he waved his hand to

## THE ONE WAY OUT

them as the train drew out of the station his eyes were wet. He was one of those weaker souls to whom happiness, not affliction, is softening.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

### II

AS Adrian Bellew, six weeks later, jumped out of the dog-cart that had brought him from the station to Ivordale Hall in Dorset, Fate, sly female, must have chuckled with glee. Her plans were so well laid, and their victim so unsuspecting, that the amusement in store for the bold-faced jade was apparently unending.

Bellew, very smart and happy in his Savile Row clothes,—for no Englishman is ever really blissful in American garments,—entered the drawing-room a few minutes later with as clear a

## THE ONE WAY OUT

conscience as that of any young child, but as he shook hands with his hostess, the conviction of sinfulness, with its attendant, the longing to flee, came down on him with terrific suddenness.

These men, these women, in England whom he would have avoided at almost any cost, and then, oh horror, even two of them sitting on a chintz-covered sofa, smiling at him.

Miss Enid Fermoy, wealthy child of Ichthyol Soap, and Miss Alice Bradnor, red-elbowed and romantic still, he saw in that awful instant, wearing the wrong kind of stays. “Is—Betty Pole stopping here?” he stammered, his mouth speaking out of the

## THE ONE WAY OUT

fulness, not of his heart, but of his horrified mind.

Lady Ivordale stared. Then she laughed. "My dear Adrian, I thought that old affair was dead long ago!"

Cursing himself for his idiotic question, Bellew insisted, as insist he must. "It is over—but—is she staying here?"

"Well, yes, as a matter-of-fact she is. She has gone for a drive with Walter. You know Miss Bradnor, I believe, and Miss Fermoy?"

Bellew shook hands with the two ladies and then sat down by them and there was a short silence.

It was frightful to think that the last time he had seen them

## THE ONE WAY OUT

he had proposed to them both, and it was more frightful to think that he had been accepted by both of them and that, in his despair, he had offered to them the unpardonable insult of returning unanswered the notes in which they had accepted him.

Miss Fermoy was the first to speak. "We were so glad," she burst out, "to hear of your good luck."

"It wasn't luck at all," he returned a little fretfully, "it was — the result of an old speculation."

"So clever of you, so clever to be able to look ahead and know that you could trust the man," murmured Alice Bradnor, who was very red.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

Bellew rose. "No cleverness about it," he returned almost rudely, "nothing but chance." Then he left them staring at each other.

## III

AS he dressed for dinner Bellew acknowledged to himself that the two girls had behaved very well. Alice Bradnor was a lady, and had he had time to reflect he never would have feared her, but the Fermoy girl was not a lady, and he realized with a shudder that there were things she might have said that would have been most unpleasant to hear. "I did behave like the most awful savage," he thought, jerking his tie impatiently, "and if she isn't a lady, well—I certainly behaved like anything on earth but a gentleman. Damned caddish trick, that's what it was!"

## THE ONE WAY OUT

However, the fair Enid was, she had informed him, going to be married shortly to the Marquis of Hengist-Horsham, so he might hope with some reason that she would not bother him. "Oh, yes, they are all right," he concluded, putting a flower in his coat and turning to the door. "If only Betty Pole were n't here——" But before he reached the stairs it came home to him with quite horrid force that Betty Pole *was* there, for before he had recognized her she was in his arms, her lips pressed to his. "Darling," was what she said, and then she put her head—that smelt faintly of hot irons—on his shoulder. "Adrian," she added.



Before he had recognized her she was in his arms, her  
lips pressed to his.



## THE ONE WAY OUT

In a second he was stunned into silence. He had expected a scene, angry words possibly, or even downright bad language, but this contingency had not occurred to him.

“Hello, Betty, h’ are you?” he stammered, withdrawing himself from her surprisingly strong arms.

“Oh, dearest!”

“I say, old girl,—it’s very jolly of you to be so glad to see —to see your good-for-nothing cousin, but—our raptures might be misunderstood.” Her expression, put on for the occasion with the rest of her make-up, did not change.

“I know—I am an idiot,” she breathed, following him to the

## THE ONE WAY OUT

wall whither he had retreated and laying her pretty clasped hands on his arm, "but—"

"I know, I know, good old Bet," he interposed hastily. "By Jove, how fit you are looking—no one would ever guess you were thirty-eight!"

But bills were huge, credit low, and marriageable men shy. She nodded confidingly. "No, would one? Ah, Adrian, perhaps it has been thinking of you that has kept me young!"

Bellew shuddered. It was going to be awful. "Come, come, old girl," he said with ghastly cheerfulness, "don't drivel. Let's be going down—I'm ravenous."

## THE ONE WAY OUT

“Heaps of time. Lady Michael is always half an hour late. And—I have waited so long—with never a word from you. Ah, Adrian, *that* was hard. I knew why. I realized that you felt you had had no right to ask me,—that it was noble of you to disappear like that,—but it nearly killed me. At first,” she hurried on as he tried to interrupt her, “I feared that my letter had not reached you, but I met Johnson in the street two days after, and he assured me he had given it to you himself, and then I understood, and I made up my mind to wait for you if it was twenty years! Oh, Adrian, I am so happy.”

## THE ONE WAY OUT

She knew that she was playing an abominable comedy, he knew it, and they each knew that the other knew it, yet the situation was so peculiar and her volubility so great that when they were interrupted by the tardy Lady Michael's approaching footsteps Bellew had not been able to say a word to mend matters and went dejectedly to dinner tacitly engaged to Lady Betty Pole, whose white throat, it is to be feared, he believed himself to be longing to wring.

“Little beast,” he thought, while his neighbour told him the latest scandal, “she got her letter back, and she perfectly well understood, and this is all a new game

## THE ONE WAY OUT

because of that cursed gold mine!" He told himself that his language, when he got his cousin alone after dinner, would be peculiarly lucid, but Lady Betty, throughout the entire evening, affected a little dreamy air that added tenfold to his irritation, and clung to Lady Ivordale so closely that he had not the opportunity he hoped for, and went to bed, but not to sleep, raging helplessly.

The next morning his man brought him a note before he was up.

DEAREST : Let 's not tell anyone to-day.  
Do you mind ? I am so happy.

BETTY.

Seizing a pencil he scrawled fiercely,

## THE ONE WAY OUT

DEAR BETTY: Not tell what? So far as I know there's nothing to tell.

ADRIAN BELLEW.

Then he lay and thought of the insulting things he would say to her when they met. She was, he knew, counting on the inherent weakness in his nature that had always prompted if not forced him to take the pleasanter and easier of two alternatives. "After all," he knew she was thinking, "he did ask me to marry him, and I said — thank heaven! — that I would. And having accepted him when he was penniless, common decency will not allow him to throw me over now that he's rich!" The little business of his having rudely and barbarously refused

## THE ONE WAY OUT

her before he left England she was putting out of the question by pretending she had never received her own note back. "She thinks I'll funk the row and the looking a cad," he reflected, "and so I would have, probably, a year ago and if—if it wasn't for Eve. As it is—just look out, Madame Betty!"

Eve Bramley and her father were, he had learned, yachting off the coast of Scotland, and were to be at home in about a fortnight. So he had come here to pass the time until he could go to Afton. "And only an unlucky devil like me could *possibly* come to a house with those three women in it," he growled with a rueful laugh.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

It annoyed him very much, his plans all being laid for a brilliant and overwhelming attack on the enemy, to find that the enemy had a bad head and was lunching upstairs, to save herself for the small dance that evening.

“She knows that the longer I leave it unsaid, the harder it will be to say it,” he fumed, frowning so that kind Lord Ivordale smiled at him knowingly. “All right then, I’ll say it at the ball!”

## THE ONE WAY OUT

### IV

IVORDALE HALL is a big house with four drawing-rooms opening into each other, so that a long-sighted person had from the yellow room a beautiful and long view through the blue and the green rooms, into the white one, where the dancing was done. Bellew, who had been smoking with another man, came into the yellow drawing-room at about twelve, and stood gazing at the dancers. It was a cool evening and the music was good, so that nearly everyone had been or was dancing, and in the soft light, thanks to the transformations and paint

## THE ONE WAY OUT

so skilfully used in England, even the grandmothers looked young and lovely.

“Apparently not an old woman in English society,” Bellew mused, and then, catching sight of Lady Betty, who was standing talking to a little man with a bald head, he squared his shoulders, and with a very bellicose air started toward her.

At the door of the green drawing-room, however, he stopped short, his expression changing with surprising quickness to one of helpless joy. “Eve!”

Eve Bramley, very lovely in her white frock, held out her hand without appearing at all surprised to see him.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

“Ah, Cousin Adrian,” she said gently, “I am glad to see you.”

Something in her quiet greeting hurt him. She had changed in the twenty-two months since they had met. She looked less delicate, her graceful shoulders were less fragile, her cheeks fuller. And as he took her hand he told himself bitterly, “She loved me then, and now—she does not.” Somehow, this possibility had never occurred to him. He had never changed, and he had been sure she would not. And now here she was, as they walked together toward an open window, her hand on his arm, asking him in the most indifferently friendly way about his crossing, when he had arrived, and how he was in general.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

They sat down, and after a minute he burst out, "Eve—there is something I want to tell you—"

She held up her hand in quiet authority. "And I have something to tell you, Cousin Adrian. I am engaged to Gerald Bantry." For a moment the ex-ditcher of Nugget City thought he was going to faint, and then, with a tremendous effort, he rose to the occasion and wished her joy. "I hope you—I am sure you will be very happy, dear little cousin," he said evenly.

It was a relief to him when she rose, and, thanking him, asked him to take her to find her father, for he felt that he would not have

## THE ONE WAY OUT

stood much more. When he had left her he escaped from the house and went to the deserted bowling-green, where he walked up and down for an hour or more trying to believe that Eve Bramley was going to marry Gerald Bantry.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

### V

AFTER all, the only thing for it was flight. The blow had been a hard one—so hard a one that it seemed to have taken all his strength from him. “If I stayed I shouldn’t have the heart to fight Betty,” he concluded, as he crept unseen to his room, “and she’d marry me—or rather that damned gold mine—out of hand. I’ll go back to town, where I can be alone, and write her from there.”

The earliest train left at 9.30, which meant his leaving the house at 9.15, but fearing a chance meeting with some one of the guests, to whom he should have

## THE ONE WAY OUT

to explain his sudden departure, Bellew decided to walk to the station, starting at about 9, and leaving his man to follow with the baggage.

Worn and weary from his sleepless night, he left the house, and drawing a long breath, started down the avenue. Only yesterday he had sauntered there, relieving his angry meditations on the subject of Lady Betty with happy dreamings about Eve. He knew that she had loved him that evening before he left England, and his not telling her that he loved her had been the one deed in his life of which he felt he might justly feel a little proud. And now it appeared that that one good

## THE ONE WAY OUT

deed had lost him. She had been too young; she had forgotten; and now that he had come back, like the hero of a romance, with untold gold to lay at her feet, she was going to marry Gerald Bantry.

To his credit, be it said, even in his bitterness of spirit the man did not accuse her of accepting Bantry for his title or for any but the one good reason. She was going to marry him; therefore it followed that she loved him.

Sick at heart, Bellew made his way down the dew-damp road, his head bent.

He raised it at the sound of horses' hoofs, and drew to one side to let the riders pass. To his

amazement, the girl on the big bay was Eve Bramley, and she pulled up to speak to him. "We are off to-day, quite unexpectedly," she began, "for more yachting, and father sent me over to tell Lady Ivordale,—she wanted me to come to stop for a day or so, but you see I can't."

Bellew stood, bareheaded, looking vaguely up at her. "You never used to ride," he observed. "I'll walk back to the house with you—" Signing to her groom to go on, she slipped off her horse and they walked slowly back. Bellew had forgotten that he was going away, he had forgotten Lady Betty, he had forgotten everything in the world but Eve Bramley.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

“Yes,—we go back to the yacht to-day. I am glad. We came to the Grenvils unexpectedly, because Bunny Grenvil is engaged and her young man was there and father wanted to meet him—”

“Bunny Grenvil engaged? Everyone is engaged, it seems to me— You, and she, and the Fermoy girl—”

Eve turned and looked at him. “And you,” she finished, smiling.

And that is how, quite simply, Lady Betty was frustrated!

“I engaged? What do you mean?” cried Bellew, standing still. She smiled again: a would-be teasing, cousinly smile, that trembled a little. “Now, Cousin Adrian! Play cricket! I know,

## THE ONE WAY OUT

because, you see, she told me herself."

And then Bellew knew.

Never mind what he thought as he realized the extent to which Lady Betty's perfidy had gone. "Eve," he said slowly, "if Betty Pole told you that she and I were engaged, she lied. I love you, and I always did love you. Now tell me when you became engaged to Bantry?"

"Oh, Adrian!"

"Yes, dearest, when?"

And then she confessed her silly little story,—how she had come to the dance full of happiness, how meeting Lady Betty and inquiring for Bellew, who was still smoking, Lady Betty had confided to her

## THE ONE WAY OUT

the tale of the engagement, and how young Bantry, who had already proposed to her, again trying his chances five minutes after Lady Betty had left her, she had in her desperation of hurt love and pride accepted him.

“What *shall* I do?” she cried, as, hidden from the house by a great clump of shrubs, Bellew held her in his happy arms.

“Do? Marry me of course.”

“But — poor Gerald? I am engaged to him.”

“And you must break the engagement. Ah, Eve, we aren’t in a book, and poor Bantry, the man whom you don’t love, must go to the wall for the man whom, God be thanked forever, you *do* love.”



"And you must break the engagement."



VI

LADY BETTY had decided to come to breakfast that morning. The evening before she had told Lady Ivordale of her engagement to Bellew, and the house party having dwindled to a small circle of intimates, the hour, she decided, had come for the bold stroke that should forever weld that gold mine to her.

So as she drank her coffee she looked up and remarked to Lord Ivordale, "Adrian is very late this morning."

Ivordale, who, she guessed, had been told by his wife of her prospects, laughed good-naturedly.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

“He isn’t used to finding you at breakfast, Madame Betty!”

Ivordale was one of the people who had always been unable to help loving Bellew, even in his most unregenerate days, and he did not much care for Lady Betty. Still, it was Bellew’s affair, not his —

Alice Bradnor, who adored Bellew so that she had long since forgiven him his unforgivable behaviour in the matter of his proposal to her, looked up nervously. She had no hope for herself, but Lady Betty as his choice appeared almost more than she could bear. Lady Betty, watching for her cue, found it in the girl’s unconscious glance. “He’ll be

## THE ONE WAY OUT

telling himself, if I don't," she murmured. "I had an awful time with him yesterday. Adrian and I have decided to pass our declining years together, à la John Anderson and his what's her name."

There was triumph in her voice, and the worm turned. Miss Bradnor flushed an ugly purplish red and set down her cup. "Oh,—my congrats," she returned promptly; "only John Anderson and his wife were married when they were *young*, weren't they?"

And before the laugh subsided the door opened, and Bellew appeared, looking amazingly young, leading Eve Bramley by the hand.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

“Lady Ivordale,—Tom,—Betty—Eve has promised to marry me,” he cried in a voice full of triumph.

There was a moment’s silence and then Lady Ivordale rushed at the agonized Eve, who had clearly anticipated no such outrageous publicity, and embraced her warmly.

“Wish me luck, Betty,” pursued Bellew, rejoicing brazenly in his new-found courage; “thus ends our fifteen-year engagement that you have broken so many times! Tom—old man—”

I am convinced that such a scene was never before perpetrated in England or out of that highly superior island. It was

## THE ONE WAY OUT

so overwhelming, so earthquake-like in its proportions that after the first shock the surprise was past, and everyone began to cast about for some way of escape, without stopping to reflect on the exact nature of the catastrophe.

Alice Bradnor, who was a kind soul, kissed Eve and sat by her, holding her hand and really taking part in the younger girl's happiness. The less interested members of the party left the room under more or less flimsy pretexts, and Lady Betty, after a loud laugh, bobbed up again out of the ruins, so to speak, with at least a few of her mental belongings safe in the small box of her self-possession. "Bless

## THE ONE WAY OUT

my soul, Adrian," she cried, holding out both her hands, "you break my heart. You have spoilt the best joke I ever got on you. I had just told everyone that you and I were engaged — you remember," she embroidered readily, "that you were asking me yesterday when I was prepared to ratify my twenty-year-old promise to be yours? — and when you came in they were all going to burst out into congrats, weren't you?"

"We were," chorussed the distressed onlookers, eagerly, Alice Bradnor the loudest of all.

"Sorry to have spoilt the fun," returned Bellew, graciously, for he could not help being sorry for

## THE ONE WAY OUT

her, "but you see you wore out my patience at last!"

No one believed in the least in this capping of his, but every one pretended to, which for all practical purposes was nearly as good. And so, after all, Adrian Bellew came to his own.

He was twenty years older than Eve; he had been, if not a bad man, at least as little to be called a good one; his return from the wilderness where he would undoubtedly have gone under had been contingent and mere chance.

And yet, under some mysterious dispensations, he had won for his this woman, almost a child, beautiful, innocent, and adoring him.

## THE ONE WAY OUT

And why? Ah, who knows why?

Possibly for the salvation of his soul, possibly because only he, such as he was, could make her happy. At all counts, so it was, and because I like him I am glad, and in the courteous and cosy way of old-time writers, may I add that I hope, gentle reader, you will be glad too?

THE END













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